

Common Topics of Concern

Northern Arizona Shooting Range

The Commission and Department understand the concerns that have been raised regarding the range location and we are committed to working with all of our constituents, neighbors, and partners to develop a safe shooting range on the Foster Ranch site that is compatible with other public uses and values in the area.

NATURAL QUIET

- ❖ Comparison to 0 dBA sound-levels does not exist in an outdoor environment.
- ❖ The more than 100,000 visitors a year to the monument have the potential for a greater influence on “natural quiet,” due to sounds from cars, buses, motorcycles, cell phones, interactive and interpretive conversations, kids playing or crying.
- ❖ Visitors of the monument are not required to maintain “quiet” while visiting the monument.
- ❖ A “quiet experience” is not listed on Walnut Canyon’s website.
- ❖ The Park Service operates a shooting range 1.5 miles from the Grand Canyon National Park visitor center for staff training.

SOUNDS FROM THE RANGE

- ❖ The ambient sound level of “quiet” at the Rim Trail was approximately 48 dBA during the sound study.
- ❖ Only faint distant reports were slightly audible, not measurable, from the Rim Trail overlook.
- ❖ Standard requirements of the range construction will further reduce sound from the range.
- ❖ Experience from operating six regional ranges, has found no significant impact to wildlife species due to gunfire sound.
- ❖ Gunfire already exists in the area from other activities and a designated shooting range should not have any additional impact.

SOUND STUDY

- ❖ A state-certified, independent contractor performed the sound study.
- ❖ The study found the sounds emitted from the range to be in compliance with state laws of below 64 dBA.
- ❖ Key stakeholders were invited to attend and witness the sound study.
- ❖ The study was done before any range construction, which will further mitigate sound levels.
- ❖ Experience from past sound studies and operating shooting ranges precluded doing a sound study prior to purchasing Foster Ranch.

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SENSITIVE SPECIES

- ❖ The shooting range is outside of any sensitive species habitat areas.
- ❖ Sensitive species databases, wildlife-linkage corridors, and environmental checklists were all consulted during the site selection process, and purchase of Foster Ranch.
- ❖ Game and Fish has a long, successful history of working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on endangered species including bald eagles, California condors, black-footed ferrets, and more.
- ❖ Wildlife conservation is core statutory responsibility and value for Game and Fish and we will continue to follow environmental compliances and address/mitigate any impacts.

WILDLIFE MOVEMENT

- ❖ The shooting range is outside of any primary wildlife linkage corridors.
- ❖ The shooting range represents a small footprint and should have no impact on wildlife using or moving through Walnut Canyon or the surrounding area.
- ❖ Game and Fish is a key partner in the Arizona Wildlife Linkages Workgroup.
- ❖ The shooting range boundaries will be fenced with wildlife-friendly fencing.
- ❖ Experience from operating six regional ranges, has found no significant impact to wildlife species or their movements.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

- ❖ Game and Fish is following State Historic Preservation Office processes, and any cultural sites on our property will be dealt with in accordance with SHPO requirements.
- ❖ Like neighboring landowners, who are also responsible for the resources on their lands, Game and Fish will inform customers of the legalities and importance of cultural resources.
- ❖ The shooting range boundaries will be fenced, and designated areas are clearly signed to keep users on site.
- ❖ Shooting sport enthusiasts in general are law-abiding, honest citizens and are at the range for shooting activities.

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2002 MONUMENT PROPOSAL

Game and Fish did generally support Alternative 2 (Preferred) for improving an existing road along the north side of the canyon on the east end, and a hiking trail to the bottom of the canyon.

Alternate 1, which proposed constructing a new road, approximately 3 ¼ miles long along the north side of the canyon on the east end, and would allow hiking to the bottom of the canyon, presented concerns to Game and Fish, including but not limited too:

- ❖ Direct increase of vehicle and human noise and disturbance in critical wildlife areas;
- ❖ Road could cause a half-mile wide fragmentation for wildlife to access the canyon’s edge;
- ❖ Several tributary channels that drain into the canyon are in the road’s pathway and could impact the hydrology system of Walnut Creek;
- ❖ Hiking to the bottom of the canyon would greatly impact wildlife and riparian areas that have been historically protected from human/visitor disturbance.
- ❖ Concern was also noted that the lands added by the 1996 boundary expansion for the protection of significant cultural resources have yet to be surveyed, fenced and posted.
- ❖ The proposed road along with visitor access into the bottom of Walnut Canyon and Walnut Creek would have a far greater impact to items of concern than the ancillary sounds from a shooting range more than one mile away from the area, and nearly three miles to the visitor’s center.

The full document of Game and Fish’s comments on the 2002 Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement on Sunset, Walnut and Wapatki National Monuments can be found online at www.azgfd.gov/nazsr.

INCREASED TRAFFIC IN AREA

- ❖ Access to the range is at a completely different exit off I-40 than the monument entrance.
- ❖ The forest road to the property is outside of the monument boundaries or any visitor areas.
- ❖ There is no anticipated traffic impact to visitors of the monument due do visitation to the shooting range
- ❖ On the contrary, the monument visitor center may see an increase in visitors that want to experience both of these valued destinations.

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SITE SELECTION

- ❖ The extensive public process to locate a shooting range site in northern Arizona has been ongoing for more than 15 years.
- ❖ Since 1995, Game and Fish has evaluated 50 sites including National Forest Service lands, State lands, tribal lands, military lands and private lands.
- ❖ Two potential sites selections were halted due to litigation and an excessive timeline/cost, associated with an unknown outcome at the end of a federal land exchange process.
- ❖ The sharp decline in the real estate market made private land purchases more affordable and open for consideration.

RAYMOND WILDLIFE AREA

- ❖ Driving distance from Flagstaff is over an hour and exceeds Commission direction and public input.
- ❖ 79-percent of respondents were unwilling to drive an hour, compared to 91 responded they would drive up to 30 minutes to the range.
- ❖ Cost to improve the nine miles of unmaintained road off I-40 with many washouts
- ❖ Property is a collection of owned, leased, and special use permits creating a checkerboard of land ownership issues.

FEDERAL VS. PRIVATE LANDS

- ❖ Game and Fish has followed all the appropriate legal, and public processes associated with a private land purchase.
- ❖ Private land acquisition processes are not the same as federal public land exchange requirements.
- ❖ National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and the public scoping related to these processes are all Federal processes – not private land purchases.
- ❖ Game and Fish did publicly communicate its interest in, approval to purchase, and final purchase of Foster Ranch in public meetings that allow public input and comments.
- ❖ Game and Fish directly contacted interested stakeholders prior to the purchase of Foster Ranch, including County, Forest, National Parks, and Friends of Walnut Canyon.
- ❖ Game and Fish does perform environmental assessments, consults the State Historic Preservation Office, performs a sound study, and other compliance processes required in developing the range.
- ❖ Negotiations of private land acquisitions by the State can be done in executive session to protect the financial interests of the state.